Gay-rights activists, Focus will hold talks

Organizers hope six-member panel will mind manners

By PAUL ASAY
THE GAZETTE

The Rev. Kelly Williams of Vanguard Church says his church has a reputation for doing things differently.

So perhaps it's no surprise that, just a week before a gay Christian organization will protest in front of the evangelical ministry Focus on the Family, Vanguard will host a summit between Focus and some of the community's leading gay-rights activists.

The Monday event, billed as Community Discussion on Homosexuality, is co-sponsored by Vanguard and Focus and will feature six panelists with different views on homosexuality. The free two-hour discussion begins at 6:30 p.m. and is open to the public.

DETAILS

Community Discussion on Homosexuality

Time: 6:30-8:30 p.m. (doors open at 5:30 p.m.)

When: April 25

Where: Vanguard Church, 3950 N. Academy Blvd.

Free. Coffee and dessert will be provided after.

The main auditorium holds 500. Overflow seating will be available, where attendees will be able to watch via video feed.

The discussion will showcase plenty of differences among panelists, but Williams hopes they will stay away from debate.

"The goal of the evening is not to see who can win," he said. "(We want to) create an environment where a name and a face is attached to the issue."

Participants say they want the discussion to provide an opportunity to clear the air over issues that have divided the community and country.

"I think it is definitely a significant event," said Focus gender analyst Melissa Fryrear, who will participate. "We're really encouraged and excited to be a part of it."

Focus, an evangelical organization based in Colorado Springs, will be the target of a May 1 protest organized by Soulforce, a gay Christian group. Soulforce, headed by Christian gay activist Mel White, could attract up to 1,000 participants.

Focus has been a leading opponent of same-sex marriage nationwide. The ministry tried to organize an April 25 debate with Soulforce officials, but they refused to participate.

"If Dobson and Focus on the Family are truly interested in dialogue, we propose, once again, that (founder) James Dobson and (Focus president) Jim Daly agree to a private dialogue with Soulforce staff, and accept the Soulforce invitation to meet our families at the family picnic right outside the gates of Focus on the Family on May 1," a March 25 statement from Soulforce read.

"To be truly relational, we need to get away from public events," said the Rev. Nori Rost, pastor for Pikes Peak Metropolitan Community College and one of the city's most outspoken Christian gay activists. "There comes a time when I just have to shake the dust off my feet."

Though the Vanguard event won't be a debate, it will give Focus officials an open forum to explain their views. An April 12 Focus memo encouraged its employees to attend the discussion.

Local Soulforce organizers won't participate in the discussion, but the panel includes three people who support gay rights: Ryan Acker, interim director of the Pikes Peak Gay and Lesbian Community Center; the Rev. Ginger Morgan, chaplain at Colorado College; and the Rev. Benjamin Broadbent, associate minister of First Congregational Church-United Church of Christ.

Focus will fill the other three seats with experts from its organization: Fryrear and Joe Dallas, who both personally rejected homosexuality and now speak at Love Won Out conferences; and Glenn Stanton, Focus' same-sex marriage expert.

Williams hopes the church will be neutral ground. Though he believes homosexual behavior is wrong, he also has criticized anti-gay moralizing.

Acker lauded Vanguard for hosting the event. "Maybe we don't change any minds, but maybe we can come to some agreement about the way we treat each other," he said.

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ME

WEDNESDAY, APRIL 20, 2005

Gazette

Top post at D-11 draws 9 applicants

Superintendent's job will be tough

By SHARI CHANEY
THE GAZETTE

Minutes before the Tuesday afternoon deadline, just nine people had applied to be the next superintendent in Colorado Springs School District 11.

Two weeks ago, Falcon School District 49 announced it had 24 candidates in its search for a superintendent. That search has since been narrowed to five finalists.

Sandy Shakes, D-11 board president, said she is not surprised her much-bigger district did not garner as many applicants as Falcon.

Sandy Shakes, D-11 board president, said she is not surprised her much bigger district did not garner as many applicants as Falcon.

It's well-known, she said, that the next D-11 superintendent will face a fractious and contentious school board.

Board members Eric Christen and Craig Cox have said that if the makeup of the board changes after the November elections, the superintendent could change, too.

Happy with nine applications, Shakes said there's a "good possibility we will find someone."

Two of the nine D-11 candidates are from Colorado, said Bob Cito, special projects consultant for the Colorado Association of School Boards, which is conducting the nationwide search for D-11.

Other applicants are from

COUNCIL MEMBERS SW

Colorado Springs City Councilman Darryl Glenn hugs City Clerk Kathryn Young after his swearing-in Tuesday outside the Pioneers Museum. Abo and counci in of the re

Playing game

Fundraiser goes toward needy Ame

By LISA MARTÍNEZ